

# FOOD SECURITY

## *In American Samoa*

### **What is the Issue?**

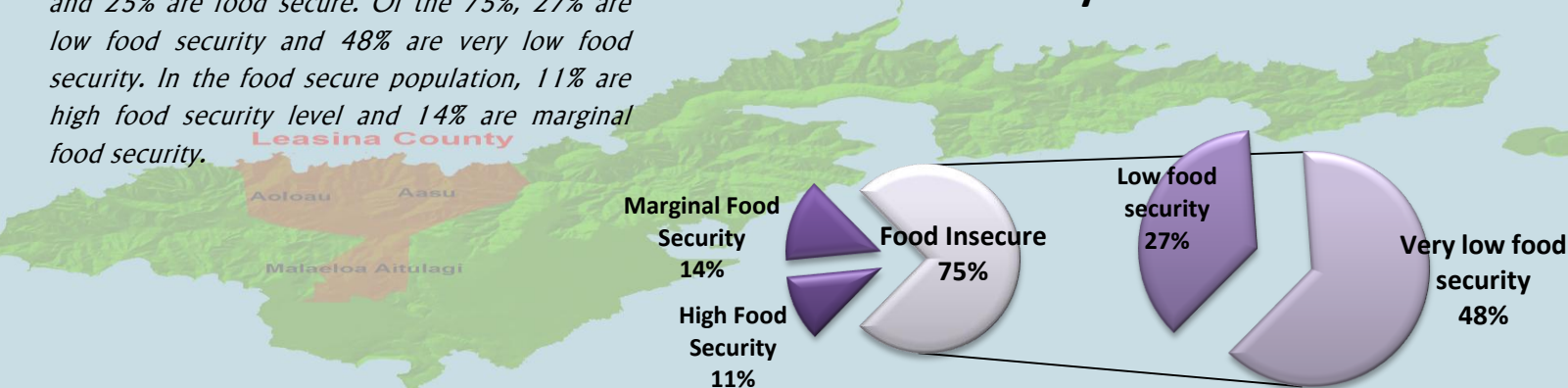
American Samoa is a US territory currently dealing with an increased number of people suffering from obesity and chronic illnesses. In 2000, 62% of individuals or 50% of families from American Samoa had incomes below the national poverty level. The substantial rise in utility and food prices over the past years has significantly increased and this has affected the cost of living in American Samoa. Since the level of food insecurity has increased all over the world, the question is: What is the level of food insecurity in American Samoa?

### **What is Food Security?**

- It exists “when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life”.
- Food Insecurity is when there is limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable way.

*75% of the sample population are food insecure, and 25% are food secure. Of the 75%, 27% are low food security and 48% are very low food security. In the food secure population, 11% are high food security level and 14% are marginal food security.*

### **Food Security Status**



### **What are the levels of Food Security? (USDA Economic Research Services)**

- High food security – Households had no problems, or anxiety about, consistently accessing adequate food.
- Marginal food security – Households had problems at times, or anxiety about, accessing adequate food, but the quality, variety, and quantity of their food intake were not substantially reduced.
- Low food security – Households reduced the quality, variety, and desirability of their diets, but the quantity of food intake and normal eating patterns were not substantially disrupted.
- Very low food security – At times during the year, eating patterns of one or more household members were disrupted and food intake reduced because the household lacked money and other resources for food.

### **How was the study conducted?**

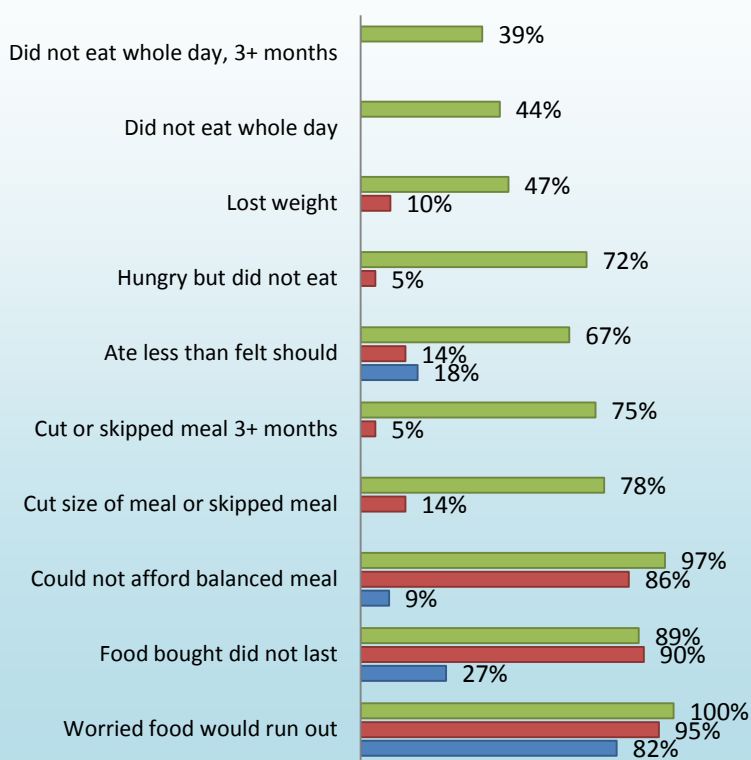
- An 18-item food security measure developed by the USDA to assess Food Insecurity is known as the Household Food Security Survey (HFSS) module. It includes ten questions concerning the experiences of adults and eight concerning respondents' experiences of providing food to children in their households.
- The USDA Household Food Security Survey (HFSS) was translated into Samoan
- The Household Food Security Survey (HFSS) was distributed to the head of households.
- A sample of households was drawn by counting every 3<sup>rd</sup> house in the villages. A total of 77 surveys were completed.

## What did the Study Find?

- The overall results shows that 25% of the population are food secure and 75% are food insecure.
- Only 6% households did not have any children under the age of 19.
- Of the households without children, about 80% are food secured (40%-high food security/40%-marginal food security) and 20% are low food security. None were very low food security.

### Households reporting each indicator of food insecurity, by food security status

■ very low food security ■ low food security ■ marginal food security



Households classified as having very low food security reported the following conditions:

- 100 percent reported having worried that their food would run out before the money to buy more.
- 89 percent reported that the food they bought just did not last and they did not have money to get more.
- 97 percent reported that they could not afford to eat balanced meals.
- 78 percent reported that an adult had cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there was not enough money for food.
- 75 percent that this had occurred in 3 or more months in one year.
- 67 percent reported that they had eaten less than they felt they should because there was not enough money.
- 72 percent reported that they had been hungry but did not eat because they could not afford enough food.
- 47 percent reported having lost weight because they did not have enough money for food.
- 44 percent reported that an adult did not eat for a whole day because there was not enough money for food.
- 39 percent reported that this had occurred in 3 or more months in one year.

### Limitations of the Study:

- Since this is a pilot study, only one county was surveyed. More counties should be surveyed to make it a true representation.
- There was a language barrier in using the survey. For instance, people cannot visualize a “balanced meal” using everyday products that are available. What are other options for balanced meal besides what’s on the “My Plate”?
- Parents are hesitant to report that they cannot afford food for the children. “Even if we don’t have enough money, we make sure we have food for our kids”.

### Needs:

- More education/awareness on terms like processed food, balanced diet, what is healthy and unhealthy and quality food.
- Another research study that will include all the counties so that the data will truly represent the population.
- For people to understand that food insecure does not mean “hunger”.

### Recommendation:

More research on Food Security issues in American Samoa. It can lead to more information on the cause and effect of food insecurity in American Samoa.



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